

Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY MANAMA PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 273811

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SHUM, BA

SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS - FINAL DRAFT OF COUNTRY EVALUA-
TION PLANS

REFERENCES: (A) STATE 133681 (B) STATE 138761

1. FOLLOWING IS DRAFT OF HUMAN RIGHTS COUNTRY EVALUATION
PLAN FOR BAHRAIN. NUMBERS AND LETTERS KEYED TO OUTLINE SET
FORTH IN REFTELS. PLEASE REVIEW THIS DRAFT AND SUBMIT ANY
SUGGESTED CHANGES OR COMMENTS TO ARRIVE IN DEPARTMENT BY
OPENING OF BUSINESS MONDAY, NOVEMBER 21.

2. (A) CONDITION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN BAHRAIN

(1) OAHRAIN, A BRITISH PROTECTORATE UNTIL FULL INDEPENDENCE
IN 1971, IS RULED BY AN HEREDITARY AMIR WHO APPOINTS HIS
CABINET MINISTERS. THE 1972 CONSTITUTION, WHICH CAREFULLY
DELINEATES THE POWERS OF AMIR AND CABINET, PROVIDES FOR AN
ELECTED NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. IN 1975, THE AMIR, FACED WITH
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STIFF OPPOSITION IN THE ASSEMBLY, SUSPENDED THOSE PROVIS-
IONS OF THE CONSTITUTION DEALING WITH THE ELECTED LEGISLA-
TIVE BRANCH, DISSOLVED THE ASSEMBLY, AND RETURNED TO RULE
BY AMIRI DECREE ON THE ADVICE OF THE CABINET. THE GOVERN-

MENT INSISTS PUBLICLY THAT THE CONSTITUTION REMAINS IN
EFFECT, AND THAT DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNMENT

WILL BE REINSTITUTED IN SOME AS YET UNDEFINED FORM IN THE NEAR FUTURE.

A. THE BAHRAINI GOVERNMENT FACES A SMALL BUT WELL-ORGANIZED RADICAL OPPOSITION WHICH ADVOCATES ITS VIOLENT OVERTHROW. THIS GROUP RECENTLY CARRIED OUT A POLITICAL ASSASSINATION. IN DEALING WITH THIS GROUP THE AUTHORITIES HAVE, ON RARE OCCASIONS, EMPLOYED TORTURE OF PERSONS DETAINED BY THE POLICE, A PRACTICE FORBIDDEN BY THE CONSTITUTION.

B. BAHRAIN HAS NOT EMPLOYED CRUEL, INHUMAN OR DEGRADING PUNISHMENT. SINCE THE LATE 18TH CENTURY, A TRADITION OF SOCIAL AMITY, WITH A PARTICULAR AVERSION TO THE VIOLENT OR CRUEL IMPLEMENTATION OF POLICE POWER, HAS PREVAILED.

C. ARBITRARY IMPRISONMENT OCCURS ONLY INFREQUENTLY IN BAHRAIN. THE CONSTITUTION STIPULATES DUE PROCESS IN SEARCH PROCEDURES.

D. EXCEPT OCCASIONALLY IN THE CASE OF TRIALS DEALING WITH THE CHARGE OF SERIOUS CRIMES AGAINST THE STATE, COURT PROCEEDINGS IN BAHRAIN ARE OPEN; ALL TRIALS ARE CONDUCTED BY FAIR AND IMPARTIAL JUDGES.

E. AS A RULE BAHRAINI AUTHORITIES OBSERVE DUE PROCESS
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WITH RESPECT TO SEARCHES. WARRANTS ARE NOT, HOWEVER, REQUIRED.

(2) A. RELIGIOUS, ETHNIC, AND RACIAL TOLERANCE HAS TRADITIONALLY BEEN A STRONG CHARACTERISTIC OF BAHRAINI SOCIAL ATTITUDES AND LEGAL PRACTICE. THE EASY ACCEPTANCE OF BAHRAINI JEWS IN IMPORTANT ROLES IN THIS ARAB/ISLAMIC COMMUNITY IS BUT ONE EXAMPLE OF THIS ENLIGHTENED ATTITUDE. THE EMANCIPATION OF WOMEN IS PROCEEDING APACE; LONG-ESTABLISHED IN EDUCATION, THEY ARE NOW MOVING TOWARD THE GOAL OF JOB EQUALITY. FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY HAS NOT BEEN AFFECTED BY THE SUSPENSION OF THE CONSTITUTION.

B. IN GENERAL, TRAVEL AND EMIGRATION POLICIES IN BAHRAIN ARE LIBERAL; MOVEMENT WITHIN BAHRAIN IS FREE.

C. WHILE REGARD FOR THE SANCTITY OF THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE RULE OF LAW REMAINS RELATIVELY HIGH, GIVEN REGIONAL HISTORY AND TRADITIONS, THE MOMENTUM TOWARD REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY SUFFERED A SETBACK WITH THE DISSOLUTION OF THE NATION-

AL ASSEMBLY IN 1975. THE RESULTING ABSENCE OF WESTERN

REPRESENTATIVE INSTITUTIONS IS, HOWEVER, IN PART COUNTER-BALANCED BY THE GENERALLY BENEVOLENT CHARACTER OF THE PRESENT BAHRAINI GOVERNMENT. TRADITIONAL INSTITUTIONS CONTINUE TO PROVIDE THE PEOPLE WITH MECHANISMS TO COMMUNICATE THEIR VIEWS TO THE AUTHORITIES.

DURING PERIODS OF HEIGHTENED SECURITY CONCERN, THE GOVERNMENT HAS BRIEFLY SUSPENDED PUBLICATION OF BAHRAINI NEWSPAPERS. EDITORIAL POLITICAL CRITICISM IN THE LOCAL PRESS IS GENERALLY BLAND. THESE FACTORS SUGGEST THAT UNDER GOVERNMENT GUIDANCE, THE BAHRAINI PRESS IS EXPECTED TO ENGAGE IN A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF "SELF-CENSORSHIP."

FOR DECADES, BAHRAIN HAS HAD THE ONLY ORGANIZED LABOR
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MOVEMENT IN THE GULF AREA, WHICH AT TIMES HAS REPRESENTED A POTENT POLITICAL FORCE. ALTHOUGH RECENTLY PLACED UNDER RESTRICTIONS FOLLOWING SUSPENSION OF THE CONSTITUTION, BAHRAINI LABOR UNIONS CONTINUE TO PERFORM EFFECTIVE SOCIAL WELFARE FUNCTIONS FOR THEIR MEMBERS.

(3) A. SINCE OIL INCOME BEGAN 40 YEARS AGO, THE BAHRAINI REGIME SET AN EXAMPLE IN THE REGION BY LIBERAL POLICIES IN PUBLIC HEALTH CARE AND EDUCATION. MORE RECENTLY, THE GOVERNMENT HAS EMBARKED ON COSTLY ANTI-INFLATION SUBSIDIES AND PUBLIC HOUSING PROGRAMS.

COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE BOOMS ARE INTENSIFYING THE INEQUALITY OF WEALTH IN THIS ESSENTIALLY FREE-ENTERPRISE COMMUNITY, AND THE PROMINENT ROLE OF THE LARGE RULING FAMILY AS LANDLORDS IS NOT LOST ON THE WAGE-EARNING CITIZEN. NEVERTHELESS, THE GOVERNMENT IS DEVOTING THE BULK OF ITS LIMITED PUBLIC RESOURCES TO ACHIEVING THE SOCIAL WELFARE PRIVILEGES GRANTED THE CITIZEN IN THE CONSTITUTION.

B. BAHRAIN'S MODEST OIL WEALTH, COMBINED WITH THE GOVERNMENT'S RELATIVELY ENLIGHTENED SOCIAL POLICIES, RESULTS IN A FAIRLY EQUITABLE DISTRIBUTION OF WEALTH IN BAHRAIN. CORRUPTION EXISTS BUT IT IS NOT A SIGNIFICANT DRAIN ON BAHRAIN'S RESOURCES.

(4) DESPITE ITS STEP BACKWARD ON THE ROAD TO REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY, THE GOVERNMENT MEETS A DECENT WORLD STANDARD IN ITS ADHERENCE TO HUMAN RIGHTS. AT PRESENT, AN OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF THE POPULATION SEEMS TO ACCEPT THE REGIME'S EMPHASIS ON LAW AND ORDER AND ECONOMIC PROGRESS AT THE EXPENSE OF INSTITUTIONALIZED POPULAR POLITICAL EXPRESSION.

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(5) AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL HAS FOLLOWED THE CASES OF MORE THAN 30 PEOPLE IMPRISONED FOR ALLEGED POLITICAL REASONS IN BAHRAIN. IN SEPTEMBER OF 1975, AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL WROTE TO THE RULER ADVOCATING RELEASE OF THESE INDIVIDUALS. MOST HAVE SINCE BEEN RELEASED BY COURT PROCEDURE.

NO RECOGNIZED INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC OR PRIVATE ORGANIZATION HAS CALLED FOR AN INVESTIGATION OF ALLEGED HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN BAHRAIN. BECAUSE THE GOVERNMENT BELIEVES IT HAS A GOOD RECORD ON HUMAN RIGHTS, IT WOULD REACT WITH ANNOYANCE AND PUZZLEMENT TO SUGGESTIONS OF INVESTIGATIONS. FREEDOM HOUSE DESCRIBES BAHRAIN AS "PARTLY FREE."

(B) ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

(1) DURING THE PERIOD THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY WAS FUNCTIONING, WE SOUGHT OCCASIONS TO COMMEND THE BAHRAINI GOVERNMENT FOR HAVING TAKEN THIS PROGRESSIVE DEMOCRATIC INITIATIVE. WHEN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY WAS DISSOLVED IN 1975, WE INFORMED THE BAHRAINIS THAT WE CONSIDERED THEIR DECISION TO BE PURELY AN INTERNAL POLITICAL MATTER, AT THE SAME TIME MAKING CLEAR OUR OWN PREFERENCE FOR PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY.

WE SHOULD CONTINUE THIS TYPE OF QUIET DIPLOMATIC PRESSURE OVER THE NEXT YEAR. IN ADDITION, WE SHOULD:

A. CONTINUE TO USE OUR INFORMATION PROGRAMS TO EMPHASIZE TO BAHRAINI LEADERS THE BENEFITS WE PERCEIVE IN REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT (LONG-TERM);

B. CONTINUE TO USE OUR CU PROGRAM TO BRING BAHRAINI LEADERS INTO CONTACT WITH OUR DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS DURING THEIR VISITS TO THE UNITED STATES (ONE YEAR);
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C. BEGIN A DIALOGUE WITH BAHRAINI OFFICIALS BETTER TO UNDERSTAND THE BAHRAINI LEGAL SYSTEM (THREE MONTHS); AND

D. CONTINUE TO BROADEN OUR RELATIONS TO EXERT BY EXAMPLE ADDITIONAL MOMENTUM TOWARD A LIBERAL SOCIETY (LONG-TERM).

(2) SINCE BAHRAIN'S REACTION TO OUR HUMAN RIGHTS POLICIES HAS BEEN GENERALLY POSITIVE, A BALANCED, LOW-KEY EFFORT TO INFLUENCE BAHRAINI ACTIONS IN THE AREA OF HUMAN RIGHTS WOULD LIKELY BE WELL RECEIVED. THERE WOULD BE LITTLE RISK TO OUR OVERALL INTERESTS IN BAHRAIN AND THE GULF REGION IN SUCH A POLICY.

(3) THE MOST SOPHISTICATED OF THE GULF ARABS, THE BAHRAINI, PROBABLY WOULD REACT POSITIVELY TO DISCREET U.S. APPROACHES IN THE AREA OF FURTHERING HUMAN RIGHTS OBJECTIVES. THE GOVERNMENT OF BAHRAIN FEELS ITSELF SUBJECT TO "RADICAL" POLITICAL PRESSURES, HOWEVER, AND SUCH AN APPROACH MUST AVOID THE APPEARANCE OF INTERFERING IN BAHRAIN'S INTERNAL AFFAIRS. IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT BECAUSE OF THEIR COMPARATIVE ADVANCEMENT (VIS-A-VIS THE GULF) IN THE AREA OF HUMAN RIGHTS, AND THEIR CONVICTION THAT QUESTIONS OF STATE SECURITY ARE INVOLVED, THE BAHRAINI WOULD NOT BE INCLINED TO PUSH MUCH HARDER THAN THEY ALREADY HAVE IN PURSUIT OF HUMAN RIGHTS GOALS.

(4) BAHRAIN COULD EXERT MINIMAL PRESSURE ON ITS GULF AND OTHER ARAB NEIGHBORS IN THE FIELD OF HUMAN RIGHTS. ITS COMPARATIVELY MINOR OIL RESOURCES GIVE IT LITTLE LEVERAGE IN ARAB AND INTERNATIONAL COUNCILS. BAHRAIN CAN, HOWEVER, PROVIDE A USEFUL EXAMPLE SHOULD THE POLITICAL CLIMATE IN THE AREA EVER TURN IN THE DIRECTION OF GREATER EMPHASIS
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